

## **TOM'S PEARL HARBOR EXPERIENCE**

**AS TOLD BY HIS BROTHER  
RAY BOWDEN**

IN APRIL 1941 I HAD REPORTED ABOARD THE USS ENTERPRISE FOR TRANSPORT TO PEARL HARBOR TH. FOR TRANSFER TO THE USS OKLAHOMA BERTHED IN PEARL HARBOR. I WAS ASSIGNED TO THE 6TH DIVISION WHERE MY BROTHER WAS ASSIGNED. MY BATTLE STATION WOULD BE IN THE AMMO TRAIN OF NUMBER 6 ANTI AIRCRAFT GUN MOUNT. I WAS ADVANCED IN RANK TO SEAMAN 2ND CLASS. IN NOVEMBER I WAS ASSIGNED MESS COOK DUTY FOR THE "H" DIVISION. THIS WAS THE SICK BAY.

ON 7, DECEMBER 1941, I PERFORMED BY USUAL DUTIES OF A MESS COOK. I HAD TAKEN THE DISHES AND SILVERWARE DOWN TO THE SCULLERY AND WAS IN THE PROCESS OF SWABBING DOWN THE DECK. WHILE DOING THIS THERE WAS AN EXPLOSION. THE SHIP KIND OF VIBRATED A LITTLE. SOME ONE SAID, "WHY ARE FIRING THE AA GUNS? I DIDN'T HEAR GQ." THEN THERE WA ANOTHER EXPLOSION AND THEN ANOTHER. THE SHIP WAS BEGINNING TO LIST TO PORT. "ALL HANDS, MAN YOUR BATTLE STATIONS THIS IS NO 'SHIT!!'"

EVERY ONE WAS HEADING FOR THE TOP SIDE LADDER WHEN THE LOUDSPEAKER CAME TO LIFE AGAIN, "ALL HANDS, ABANDON SHIP, ALL HANDS ABANDON SHIP, THIS IS NO DRILL!!" I GOT TO TOP SIDE AND REALLY HAD TO SCRAMBLE TO GET TO THE LIFE LINES. IT WAS MADE A LITTLE EASIER BY THE FACT THAT MY DUTY WAS ON THE STARBOARD SLIDE. I GOT THROUGH THE LIFELINES AND STARED DOWN AT THE BOTTOM OF THE SHIP. J SAW ONE MAN TRY TO DIVE OFF THE SHIP AND WOUND UP SPLATTERED ALL OVER THE BOTTOM. I DECIDED TO SLIDE DOWN. IT WOULD BE A BUMPY RIDE BUT I HAD NO CHOICE. THE PLANES COMING IN ON THE PORT SIDE WERE FIRING THEIR GUNS AS THEY CAME IN AND I DIDN'T WANT TO TAKE THE CHANCE OF BEING A LIVING TARGET FOR THESE GUYS.

I PUSHED OFF AND HIT THE WATER. I SWAM OVER TO THE

MARYLAND. SOME ONE THREW ME A ROPE AND I CLIMBED UP TO THE BLISTER. AS I WENT THROUGH THE LIFE LINES I HAPPENED TO LOOK UP AND THERE WAS MY BROTHER, RAY, GOING THROUGH THE LINES. WE HAD A QUICK HUG AND HOW ARE YOU AND WE SEPARATED. I ASKED RAY WHAT WE SHOULD DO HE TOLD ME TO GO TO MY REGULAR BATTLE STATION/ I DID. ALL THE GUN CREWS WERE STANDING AROUND WAITING FOR ELECTRICITY AND AIR TO FIRE THE GUNS. SOME OF THE OKIE'S GUNNERS LITERALLY THREW THE MARYLAND GUYS OFF THEIR OWN GUNS AND YELLED AT THE AMMO TRAIN GET MOVING THIS AINT NO DRILL MOVE!!

WE TOOK ALL THE AMMO OUT OF THE READY BOX, ABOUT THIRTY FIVE ROUNDS, AND WHAT WE DIDN'T KNOW WAS THAT IT WAS MOSTLY PRACTICE AMMO. WE WEREN'T THE ONLY ONES THERE WERE QUITE A FEW WHITE PUFFS OF SMOKE FROM THE PRACTICE ROUNDS AS OPPOSED TO THE BLACK SMOKE OF REAL AMMO. HOWEVER, THE OKIE CREW FIRED ALL THAT AMMO, WEARING BLISTERS ON THEIR HANDS AND BLISTERED THE PAINT ON THE GUN. SOMEWHERE ALONG THE LINE THE POWER AND AIR CAME ON AND THE REST OF THE GUNS GOT INTO THE ACT. AT THIS POINT THE OKIE GUNNERS STEPPED BACK AND LET THE REGULAR CREW TAKE OVER.

I DON'T KNOW HOW LONG WE WERE THERE BUT SOON AN OFFICER CAME BY AND ORDERED ALL OKLAHOMA MEN OVER TO THE QUAY WHERE WE WERE LOADED INTO BOATS AND TAKEN TO FORD ISLAND. WE WERE ASSIGNED TO VARIOUS BOATS, OUR JOB WAS TO ASSIST ANY ONE IN THE WATER, HELP THEM ABOARD. LATER WE WERE SENT OUT TO THE AMMO DUMP AT WESTR LOCK.